



Emergency Housing Ordinance Renewal FAQs

Emergency homeless encampments are currently allowed as a permitted temporary use in unincorporated Thurston County under Thurston County Code 20.35 Homeless Encampments, Ordinance #14402 (2010). A sponsoring agency must apply for a Homeless Encampment permit and demonstrate that they can meet development code regulations in order to be issued a permit to establish a camp.

On June 25, 2019 the Board adopted interim regulations that provide an option to waive some requirements related to emergency homeless encampments with Ordinance #15792. This was partly in response to the Thurston County Board declaring homelessness a public health crisis with Resolution H-2-2018. The Interim ordinance was renewed June 25, 2020, renewed and amended December 9, 2020, and renewed again as amended May 25, 2021.

In the December 2020 renewal, an additional waiver was added to allow the use of heating and cooking appliances within RVs that are within a permitted homeless encampment.

Q. What does renewal of the interim EHO do or allow for?

Provides a toolbox that can be used OR not used as context requires.

Instructs Staff to continue research and collaboration around best practices for homeless response.

- The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.390) allows interim zoning ordinances to be effective for up to one year if a work plan is developed for related studies. The interim ordinance established a one-year work plan for exploring adoption of final regulations into Thurston County Code. Interim zoning ordinances may be renewed in six-month periods if the Board holds a public hearing and findings of fact are made prior to each renewal.

Allows the County to more flexibly work with partners in a regional capacity to address the homelessness crisis.

- The Interim EHO continues to affect several sections of the current Emergency Homeless Encampment regulations in the Thurston County Zoning Ordinance (Title 20), the Zoning Ordinance for the Lacey Urban Growth Area (Title 21), the Tumwater UGA Zoning Ordinance (Title 22), and the Olympia UGA Zoning Ordinance. Specifically, Sections 20.35.090, 21.64.130, 22.51.090, 23.45.130 Thurston County Code which regulate Homeless Encampments.

Creates an option for an agency to apply for the loosening of certain homeless encampment restrictions and regulations during the permit application stage (essentially applying for “lower barrier” homeless response options). Any and all waiver requests MUST be approved by Thurston County’s CPED Director.

- For example, Interim EHO Ordinance #15792 could allow for more persons in a permitted temporary homeless encampment (if application is approved). Without this option, there is an established 40-person maximum limit under Ordinance #14402.

Q. What regulations cannot be waived?

All sanitary portable toilets shall be screened from adjacent properties and rights-of-way.

All temporary structures within the homeless encampment shall conform to all building codes.

The homeless encampment shall conform to fire safety requirements.

The host agency shall provide to all residents of the homeless encampment a "Code of Conduct" for living at the encampment.

All homeless encampment residents must sign an agreement to abide by the code of conduct. Failure to abide by the code of conduct and the operations and security plan shall result in the noncompliant resident's immediate and permanent expulsion from the property.

The sponsoring agency will use identification to obtain sex offender and warrant checks for prospective and existing homeless encampment residents.

The sponsoring agency shall self-police and self-manage its residents and shall prohibit alcohol, illegal drugs, fighting, and abuse of any kind, littering or disturbing neighbors while located on the property.

Q. Why was language around ADUs added to the renewal of this ordinance?

The Board of County Commissioners wanted to express a broader commitment to providing affordable housing as a response to the homelessness crisis, including adopting regulations for Accessory Dwelling Units.

Waiver(s) of specific requirements are valid for up to 6 months. They may be extended if the Board holds a public hearing and finds a public health emergency continues to exist. Only after this could the waiver(s) be extended for an additional six (6) month period.

This interim ordinance supports Thurston County Strategic Plan Initiative #3 to address homelessness and allows for a waiver of certain (not all) requirements related to homeless encampments. If the interim Emergency Housing Ordinance is approved by the Board, the next cycle for renewal would fall in December 2021.

For More Information:

**visit: <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/Pages/comp-plan-eho.aspx>
or contact Leah Davis at Leah.Davis@co.thurston.wa.us.**